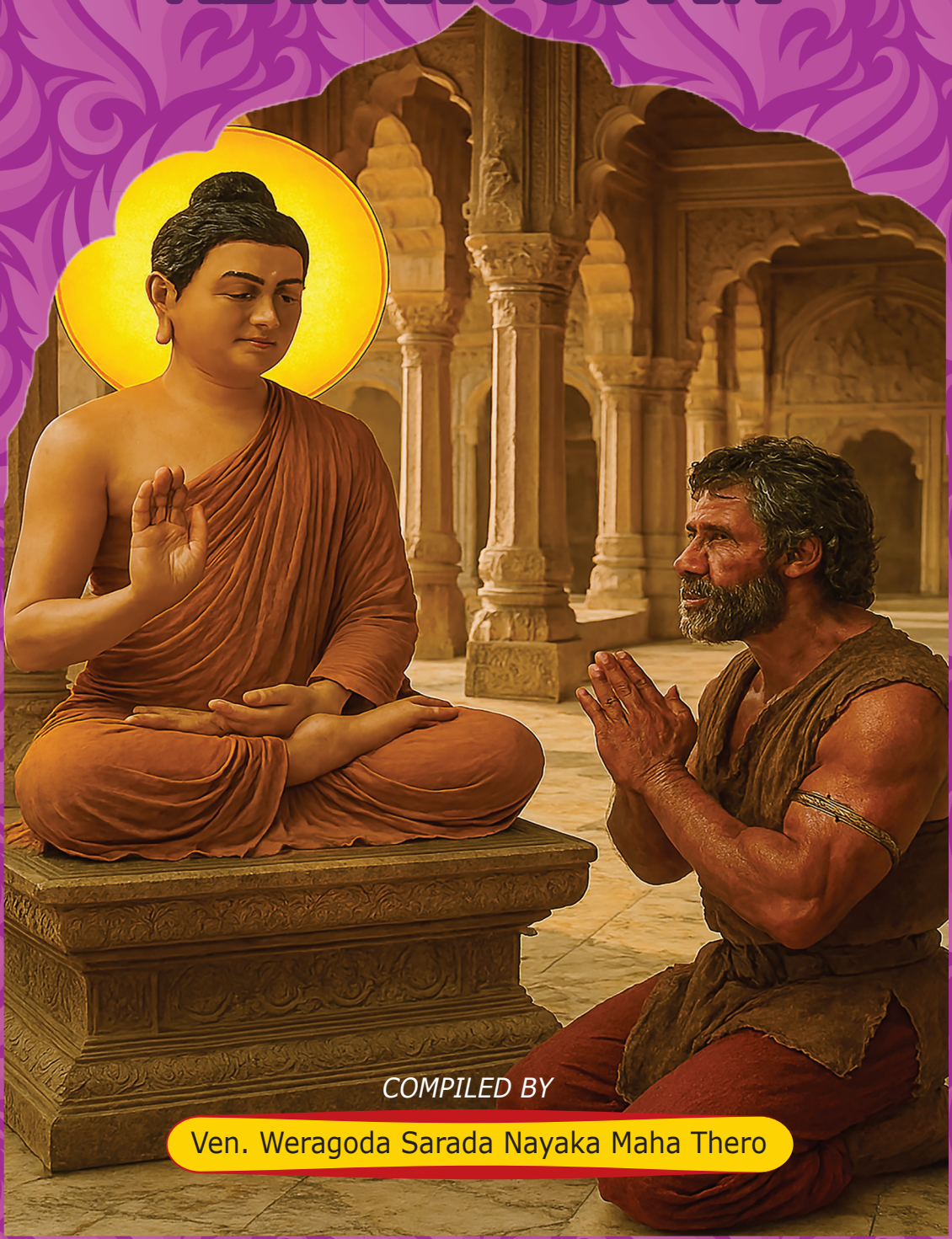
ĀLAVAKA SUTTA



COMPILED BY

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ĀLAVAKA SUTTA
Discourse to Ālavaka

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May they attain the Bliss of Nibbana.

Ven. Weragoda Sarada Nayaka Maha Thero
13. 03. 2026

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa

Evaṃ me sutaṃ, ekaṃ samayaṃ Bhagavā, Ālaviyaṃ viharati Ālavakassa yakkhassa bhavane, atha kho Ālavako yakkho yena Bhagavā ten'upasankami, upasankamitvā Bhagavantaṃ etadavoca

Thus, have I heard: On one occasion the Blessed One was living in the abode of **Ālavaka**, the **Yakkha** (demon), at Alavi. Then **Ālavaka** approached the Blessed One, and said:

Nikkhama, samaṇā'ti "Sādh'āvuso"ti Bhagavā nikkhami. "Pāvisa, Samaṇā" ti "Sādh'āvuso"ti Bhagavā pāvisi

Get out recluse (**samaṇa**). Very well, friend, so saying the Blessed One went out.
Come in recluse. Very well, friend, so saying the Blessed One entered.

Dutiyam'pi kho, Ālavako yakkho Bhagavantaṃ etadavoca Nikkhama, Samaṇā'ti "Sādh'āvuso"ti Bhagavā nikkhami Pavisa, Samaṇā'ti "Sādh'āvuso"ti Bhagavā pāvisi

Get out recluse, said to the Blessed One a second time.
Very well, friend, so saying the Blessed One went out.
Come in, recluse. Very well, friend, so saying the Blessed One entered.

Tatiyam'pi kho Ālavako yakkho Bhagavantaṃ etadavoca Nikkhama Samaṇā'ti "Sādh'āvuso"ti Bhagavā nikkhami Pavisa, Samanā' ti "Sādh'āvuso"ti Bhagavā pāvisi

Get out, recluse, said **Ālavaka** to the Blessed One a third time. Very well, friend, so saying the Blessed One went out.
Come in recluse. Very well, friend, so saying the Blessed One entered.

Catuttham' pi kho, Ālavako yakkho Bhagavantaṃ etadavoca Nikkhama, Samaṇā'ti Nakhvāhaṃ, āvuso, nikkhamissāmi
Yan te karaṇīyaṃ tam karohī'ti
"Pañham taṃ, Samaṇa, pucchissāmi Sace me na vyākarissasi cittaṃ vā te khipissāmi hadayaṃ vā te phālessāmi pādesu vā gahetvā pāragaṅgāyaṃ khipissāmi'ti Nakhvāhaṇtaṃ āvuso passāmi, sadevake loke samārake sabrahmake sassamaṇabrāhmaṇiyā pajāya sadevamanussāya yo me cittaṃ vā khipeyya hadayaṃ vā phāleyya pādesu vā gahetvā pāragaṅgāya khipeyya Apica, tvaṃ āvuso puccha yadākaṅkhasi' ti

Get out, recluse, said Ālavaka to the Blessed One a fourth time. No, O friend, I will not get out. Do what you will.
I will ask you a question, recluse. If you do not answer me, I will confound your mind (thoughts), or cleave your heart, or take you by your feet and fling you over to the further

shore of the ocean (**pāra gaṅgāya**). Well, friend, I do not see anyone in the world of Devas, Maras, Brahmas, or among the generation of recluses, brahmanas, deities and humans, who could either confound my mind or cleave my heart, or take me by the feet and fling me over to the further shore of the ocean; nevertheless, friend, ask what you will.

Atha, kho, Ālavako yakkho Bhagavantaṃ gāthāya ajjhabhāsi

Then **Ālavaka** addressed the Blessed One in verse:

Kiṃ sūdha vittaṃ purisassaseṭṭhaṃ?
Kiṃsū, suciṇṇo sukhamāvahāti?
Kiṃsū have, sādhutaraṃ rasānaṃ?
Kathaṃ jiviṃ jīvitamāhu seṭṭhaṃ? ti

What wealth here is best for man?
What well practised will happiness bring?
What taste excels all other tastes?
How lived is the life they say is best?

Saddhīdha vittaṃ purisassaseṭṭhaṃ

Dhammo suciṇṇo sukhamāvahāti
Saccaṃ have, sādhutaraṃ rasānaṃ
Paññājiviṃ jīvitamāhu, seṭṭhaṃ ti

Faith is the wealth here best for man; Dhamma well practised shall happiness bring; Truth indeed all other tastes excels;
Life wisely lived they say is best.

Kathaṃsu taratī oghaṃ?
Kathaṃsu taratī aṇṇavaṃ?
Kathaṃsu dukkhaṃ acceti?
Kathaṃsu parisujjhati?

How does one the currents cross?
How is ocean's existence crossed?
How is one's suffering quelled?
How is one purified?

Saddhāya taratī oghaṃ
Appamādena aṇṇavaṃ
Viriyena dukkhaṃ acceti
Paññāya parisujjati

By faith are currents crossed;

By diligence is the ocean crossed;
By effort is one's suffering quelled;
By wisdom is one purified.

Kathaṃsu labhate paññaṃ?
Kathaṃsu vindate dhanaṃ?
Kathaṃsu kittiṃ pappoti?
Kathaṃ mittāni ganthati?
Asmā lokā paraṃ lokaṃ
Kathaṃ pecca na socati?

How does one wisdom win?
How does one wealth obtain?
How does one come to fame?
How does one friendship win?
How does one without sorrow fare? –
When from this world to another he's gone?

Saddahāno arahataṃ
Dhammaṃ, Nibbānapattiyā,
Sussūsā labhate paññaṃ
Appamatto vicakkhaṇo
Patirūpakārī, dhuravā
Uṭṭhātā, vindate dhanaṃ
Saccena kittiṃ pappoti.

Dadaṃ mittāni ganthati
Yass'ete caturo dhammā
Saddhassa gharamesino
Saccaṃ, damo, dhitī, cāgo
Sa ve pecca na socati"
Asmā lokā paraṃ lokaṃ
Sa ve pecca na socati

The mindful and discerning one,
Who in the Dhamma plead his faith;
By his will to hear that Dhamma
Wins the wisdom of Nibbana.
Who is tactful and energetic,
And gains wealth by his own effort;
Fame will he acquire by truth,
And friendship by his giving.
He who has faith and is also truthful,
Virtuous, firm and fond of giving;
By virtue of these four conditions
Will never in the hereafter grieve.

Iṅgha aññe'pi pucchassū
Puthu samaṇabrāhmaṇe
Yadi saccā, damā, cāgā
Khantyā, bhiyyo na vijjati

Truth and Restraint, Charity and Forbearance,
Are the greatest reformers of man;
If there be any better
Ask of other **samaṇas** and **brāhmaṇas**.

Kathannu'dāni puccheyyaṃ
Puthu samaṇabrāhmaṇe?
So'haṃ ajja pajānāmi
Yo cattho saṃparāyiko

Why should I now try to ask
From other **samaṇas** and **brahmaṇas**
When this day I came to learn
What wealth is here and hereafter?

Atthāya vata me, Buddho
Vāsāyālavimāgamī
So'haṃ ajja pajānāmi
Yattha dinnaṃ mahapphalaṃ

'Tis for my wealth indeed
The Buddha to Alavi came;
A gift will always bear a fruit;
This too I learnt today.

So ahaṃ vicarissāmi gāmā gāmaṃ,
purā puraṃ
Namassamāno Sambuddhaṃ
Dhammassa ca sudhammatan'ti

From village to village and town to town
I shall now wander along
Praising that Supreme Buddha
And the Dhamma well preached by him.

Evaṃ vutte Ālavako yakkho
Bhagavantaṃ etadavoca
Abhikkantaṃ bho Gotama,
abhikkantaṃ bho Gotama seyyathāpi,
bho Gotama, nikkujjitaṃ vā
ukkujjeyya paṭicchannaṃ va vivareyya
mūḷhassa vā maggaṃ ācikkheyya
andhakāre vā telapajjotaṃ dhāreyya
cakkhumanto rūpāni dakkhintī' ti
Evamevaṃ bhotā Gotamena
anekapariyāyena Dhammo pakāsito
Esāhaṃ bhavantaṃ Gotamaṃ saraṇaṃ
gacchāmi Dhammañca
Bhikkhusaṅghañca
Upāsakaṃ maṃ bhavaṃ Gotamo

dharetu ajjatagge pāṇupetaṃ saraṇaṃ gatan'ti

Having thus spoken, **Ālavaka** said to the Blessed One: 'Most excellent, O Gotama, is thy teaching, most excellent. Just as a man would set upright what is overturned, reveal what et is concealed, point out the way to one gone astray, bring an oil lamp into the darkness so, that those with eyes could see objects; even so the Dhamma (Doctrine) has been declared in many a manner by the Venerable Gotama. I take refuge in the Venerable Gotama Buddha), in the Dhamma and in the Sangha (the Order). May the Venerable Gotama accept me as a disciple who has taken refuge, from this day forth, while life lasts.'

Āḷavaka Sutta

We've heard about this **Āḷavaka** — a **yakṣa** (spirit being). The Blessed One (Buddha) preached the Dhamma to this **yakṣa** in this particular way. As a result, this **yakṣa** attained the fruit of stream-entry (**sotāpanna**). We often speak of **Āḷavaka** as a demon — a non-human being.

A Detailed Account of Āḷavaka from the Commentaries

According to the commentarial texts, there is an extended account of **Āḷavaka**. During the time when the Blessed One was residing at the **Jetavana** Monastery in **Sāvatthi**, there existed a city nearby called **Āḷavī**. The people of that city were known to be extremely violent and unruly. They were deeply engaged in the five kinds of unwholesome conduct (**pañca duccaritāni**).

Because of this, whenever a virtuous or ordinary person attempted to enter the city of **Āḷavī**, they did so with great fear. If someone entered without the approval of these people, they were often subjected to various forms of danger. There was a

real risk of losing one's life. One might be beaten—or even killed.

The Ruthless Realm of Āḷavī and the Dark Legacy of Āḷavaka

Āḷavī was a region ruled by fear—a place where a brutal faction had spread its dominance and lived by violence. Among this fearsome group, **Āḷavaka** stood as their leader: a figure akin to a criminal overlord, deeply immersed in the fivefold misconduct (**pañca duccaritāni**). His cruelty extended beyond mere animal slaughter—he was known to kill humans for hire.

Some of the king's most ruthless operations were entrusted to this underworld faction led by **Āḷavaka**. When a kingdom prepared for invasion or sought to sow discord among rival nations, it was often **Āḷavaka**'s group that carried out the preliminary acts of terror. These operations were funded through payments and bribes, sustaining the group for their violent services.

They also engaged in illicit sexual activities, turning vice into a source of income. Their influence stretched across borders, constantly stirring division, spreading lies, and

manufacturing conflict. As a result, the people of **Āḷavī** lived in constant fear and submission.

Yet—before all this—**Āḷavaka** had a latent spiritual potential. A seed of merit (**puñña shakti**) lay dormant within him.

The Buddha's Great Compassion and His Journey to Āḷavī

At the break of dawn, the Blessed One entered the meditative absorption of Great Compassion (**mahā-karuṇā-samāpatti**) and surveyed the world with his boundless heart. "Whom shall I assist today?" he reflected. "Who among the fortunate ones has the merit to realize the Dhamma?"

On that day, the Buddha perceived that **Āḷavaka**, despite his fearsome nature, possessed the potential to awaken to the Dhamma. If subdued and guided, **Āḷavaka** could attain realization—and through his transformation, countless others under his sway would be drawn to the path of Dhamma. The social turmoil he caused would cease. The fear and trembling he instilled in the hearts of many would dissolve. The people, once oppressed, would finally live in peace and joy.

Contemplating all this, the Buddha took up his alms bowl and robe and set out toward the city of **Āḷavī**.

As he approached, many people pleaded with him: "Venerable Sir, please do not go to that region. It is inhabited by ruthless and violent people. They may bring harm to you. These are not people inclined to listen to the Dhamma."

But the Buddha, moved by compassion and unshaken in resolve, continued on his way—for he saw not just the danger, but the possibility of liberation.

The Buddha's Visit to Āḷavaka's Home

Despite all warnings, the Blessed One made his way to the city of **Āḷavī** and approached the very home of **Āḷavaka**—the ruthless leader of the city's most feared faction. But at the time of the Buddha's arrival, **Āḷavaka** was away, having gone out with his gang to attend a secret gathering. Most likely, it was a meeting to plot some violent scheme, steeped in the fivefold misconduct.

Thus, the Buddha arrived at **Āḷavaka**'s home during his absence. There, he encountered

Āḷavaka's wife, children, and household members. With serene composure, the Blessed One was offered a seat, and he began to share the Dhamma with them—gently, clearly, in a way that illuminated their hearts.

Meanwhile, a member of **Āḷavaka**'s group, returning quickly with a message, caught sight of the scene: the Buddha seated peacefully in the home, conversing with **Āḷavaka**'s wife and children. Alarmed, he thought, "Look at this! While our leader is away, the **Sākyan** ascetic—the Blessed One himself—has entered his house and is speaking intimately with his family!"
Realizing the gravity of the situation, he rushed off at once, running breathlessly to deliver the news. Reaching the gathering, he exclaimed to **Āḷavaka**, "While you were away, the **Sākyan** ascetic, the Blessed One, came to your house. He is now sitting with your wife and children, speaking with them in peace and joy. I saw it with my own eyes—that's why I came running to tell you!"

Āḷavaka's Fury and the Gathering Storm

At that moment, **Āḷavaka** was consumed by rage and vengeance. "While I was away," he fumed,

“this ascetic dared to enter my domain—my house—and speak with my wife and children without fear. I will teach him a harsh lesson.”

Alongside his fury, a flicker of shame stirred within him. For someone like **Āḷavaka**, known for his cruel and violent deeds, the fact that the Buddha had calmly entered his home unsettled him. It threatened his authority. If word spread that the Blessed One had visited his house, it could undermine his control over the gang and the city.

Determined to assert his dominance, **Āḷavaka** hardened his demeanor, adopting a fierce and intimidating posture. He rushed toward his home, declaring, “I’ll make him regret this.”

Behind him followed the entire faction—his ruthless band of followers. They too were eager to witness what would unfold. “Let’s go see,” they said, “Today, **Āḷavaka** will teach the **Sākyan** ascetic a lesson. Let’s see what happens.” A crowd gathered, running behind **Āḷavaka**, curious and tense. From a distance, they watched. Inside the house, the Blessed One continued his gentle conversation with **Āḷavaka**’s wife and children. As **Āḷavaka** approached, his wife saw

him coming. Overcome with fear, she quickly rose with the children and fled inside the house, trembling.

Āḷavaka's Challenge and the Buddha's Unshaken Grace

As **Āḷavaka** arrived, many onlookers whispered anxiously, "Now he'll cause trouble for the Blessed One." **Āḷavaka** was seething with fury toward the Buddha. In a harsh, contemptuous tone, he shouted, "**Nikhamma samaṇa**!"—a phrase that, though it literally means "ascetic who has renounced," was uttered here not with reverence, but as a sharp command: "Get out, ascetic!" This was no respectful address—it was a forceful dismissal. But the Buddha, perceiving the deep hatred and violent anger in **Āḷavaka**'s heart, rose calmly and walked outside without resistance. He showed no trace of fear or agitation, only peaceful composure.

Seeing the Buddha's serene exit, **Āḷavaka** thought, "Now the crowd is watching. I'll teach him a lesson in front of everyone." He barked again, "**Pavisa samaṇa**!"—not as a polite invitation, but as a harsh order: "Come back in!" The Buddha, with boundless loving-kindness,

turned and re-entered the house, resuming his seat with tranquil dignity.

A second time, **Āḷavaka** snarled, "**Nikhamma samaṇa**!" And again, the Buddha rose and walked out, undisturbed. Then came the third command: "**Pavisa samaṇa**!" Once more, the Buddha re-entered, his presence radiating peace. Thus, three times **Āḷavaka** tried to exhaust and humiliate the Blessed One—sending him out and calling him back in. But each time, the Buddha responded with unwavering calm, revealing the strength of compassion and the futility of anger.

The Fourth Command and the Buddha's Unshaken Compassion

Āḷavaka thought to himself, "I'll wear him down in front of everyone. Let them see me exhaust this ascetic by sending him back and forth." The crowd watched in suspense, whispering, "What will happen now? What might unfold?" With fierce intensity, **Āḷavaka** commanded the Blessed One three times— "Get out!" "Come in!" "Get out!"—each time with harsh, cutting words. And each time, the Buddha responded with serene composure, rising and walking as instructed, never showing anger or fatigue. But on the fourth

command—again, "**Nikhamma samaṇa**!"—the Buddha did not rise. This was not defiance. It was compassion.

The Blessed One, having endured three rounds of **Āḷavaka**'s aggression, now remained seated—not to resist, but to protect. For if he had risen a fourth time, **Āḷavaka**'s own karmic force might have turned fatally against him. His head could have split from his body, and he would have died on the spot. Thus, out of great compassion, the Buddha stayed seated. He had already shown patience, restraint, and grace. Now, he acted to prevent **Āḷavaka**'s self-destruction. This moment marked the beginning of **Āḷavaka**'s transformation—from fury to humility, from dominance to awakening.

The Buddha's Supreme Virtue and the Compassionate Restraint Toward Āḷavaka

There is a powerful episode in the Dhamma. One day, while the Blessed One was engaged in conversation with King **Pasenadi** of **Kosala**, a group of ascetics passed by—first the **Niganṭhas**, then various wandering seekers (**paribbājakas**). Though the Buddha remained seated, King **Pasenadi** rose, took his upper robe in hand, and

bowed his head in reverence as they passed. The king then asked the Blessed One:
"Venerable Sir, many of these ascetics are older than you. They have practiced severe austerities for a long time. Why do you not show them respect?"

The Buddha replied: "If the **Tathāgata** were to rise or bow his head to someone out of reverence, that person's head would split from his body and fall to the ground."

Such is the immeasurable power of a Buddha's virtue. There is no one in the world—among gods or humans—worthy of receiving reverence from the **Tathāgata**. His name alone commands the highest honor. Yet, when it came to subduing **Āḷavaka**, the Blessed One rose and walked out three times at his command, and returned each time. This was not submission—it was compassion. It was a deliberate act to tame a violent heart.

But beyond the third time, the Buddha remained seated. He did not rise again. Had he done so, **Āḷavaka**'s own karmic force might have turned against him, causing his head to split and fall. The Buddha's restraint was not for his own dignity—

it was to protect **Āḷavaka** from self-destruction. And in that moment, something shifted in **Āḷavaka**. His rage began to soften. He muttered, "You've endured me again and again…" The storm of anger was beginning to dissolve in the light of compassion.

Āḷavaka's Threat and the Buddha's Fearless Response

After the Buddha had calmly endured **Āḷavaka**'s commands to go in and out three times, **Āḷavaka** shifted tactics. He said, "Fine then. Now I will ask you a series of questions. If you fail to answer them, I will shatter your thoughts. Not only that—I will tear out your heart, grab you by both legs, and hurl you across the threshold!" His words were sharp, violent, and filled with menace. He spoke to the Blessed One with fierce hostility.

But the Buddha, unshaken, replied: "**Āḷavaka**, in this world of gods, humans, and spirits, there is no one—among ascetics or brahmins—who can confuse the mind of a **Tathāgata**, tear out his heart, or lift him by the feet and throw him."

Such was the Buddha's fearless declaration—not born of pride, but of truth. His mind was

unassailable, his body inviolable, his compassion boundless. Then the Buddha said, “Go ahead. Ask your questions. I will answer them.” **Āḷavaka** had many questions—deep, probing, and ancient. These were not random riddles. They had been passed down through generations. His ancestors had long sought answers to these very questions. **Āḷavaka** now sat before the Buddha, determined to ask them all. He thought, “If he cannot answer, I will punish him. But if he can… then perhaps I will finally find the truth my forefathers sought.” And so, the great riddle dialogue began.

This is a beautiful moment in the **Āḷavaka Sutta**—the fierce challenger becomes the seeker, and the Buddha responds with luminous wisdom.

Āḷavaka’s First Four Questions
(The Riddle Begins)

1. ***Āḷavaka*** *asks*: **"Kiṃ sūdha vittaṃ purisassa seṭṭhaṃ?"** What is the highest possession a person can have?
   The Buddha replies: **"Saddhīdha vittaṃ purisassa seṭṭhaṃ."** Faith is the supreme wealth of a human being. Faith in the Triple Gem is unmatched in this world.

2. ***Āḷavaka*** *asks*: **"Kiṃ su sucinno sukhamāvahāti?"** What kind of practice brings lasting happiness?
   The Buddha replies: **"Dhammo suciṇṇo sukhamāvahāti."** Well-practiced Dhamma brings true happiness—A life lived in virtue bears the fruit of peace.

3. ***Āḷavaka*** *asks*: **"Kiṃ su have sādhutaraṃ rasānaṃ?"** What is the most sublime of all tastes?
   The Buddha replies: **"Saccaṃ have sādhutaraṃ rasānaṃ."** Truth is the sweetest taste of all— More exquisite than any worldly flavor.

4. ***Āḷavaka*** *asks*: **"Kathaṃ jīviṃ jīvitaṃ āhu seṭṭhaṃ?"** What kind of life is considered the best?
   The Buddha replies: **"Paññājīviṃ jīvitaṃ āhu seṭṭhaṃ."** A life lived with wisdom is supreme—Guided by insight, it leads to liberation.

Next, **Āḷavaka** asked the question: **“Kiṃsu have sādhutaraṃ rasānaṃ?”** —Among all tastes, what is the most sublime? The Blessed One explained: **“Saccaṃ have sādhutaraṃ**

rasānaṃ.”—Speaking the truth is the most sublime of all tastes. Truth, the Buddha said, is the highest among all flavors.

Now consider this: the Buddha appeared in this world to proclaim the most exalted truth among truths—the Four Noble Truths (**Cattāri Ariya Saccāni**). These truths are not subject to change; they are eternal laws of reality. The Buddha teaches this supreme truth, and from it flows the practice of truthful speech—gentle, sincere, and beneficial words. That is why he declared: among all tastes in the world, truth is the most sublime.

Now observe: as the Blessed One began answering these questions, the anger that **Āḷavaka** had harbored toward him gradually began to dissolve. **Āḷavaka** sat before the Buddha, asking his questions one by one. He began to reflect: “These questions—passed down from our ancestors—have remained unanswered for generations. And now, thanks to the Blessed One, we are finally receiving answers. Isn’t this extraordinary?”

With this thought in mind, **Āḷavaka** asked his next question: **“Kathaṃ su taratī oghaṃ?”**—How does one cross the flood? Then he asked:

“Kathaṃ su taratī aṇṇavaṃ?” —How does one cross the ocean?

These were not merely physical questions—they were metaphors for **saṃsāra**, the endless cycle of birth and death. **Āḷavaka** was asking: “How does one cross the ocean of existence and reach the other shore?” And then he asked: **“Kathaṃ su dukkhaṃ acceti?”**—How does one overcome suffering?

Then we see: despite the violent life **Āḷavaka** had led, he possessed a certain depth of knowledge. He understood suffering. And because of that understanding, a question had been passed down through his lineage—“How does one end suffering?” This question had lived in their tradition, unanswered.

Now, **Āḷavaka** asked the Blessed One directly: **“Kathaṃ su dukkhaṃ acceti?”**—How does one overcome suffering? Then he asked: **“Kathaṃ su parisujjhati?”**—How does one become purified? These four questions—

- How does one cross the flood?
- How does one cross the ocean?
- How does one overcome suffering?
- How does one become purified?

—were not just philosophical riddles. They were cries from the depths of **saṃsāra**. They revealed a yearning to escape the storm, to reach the other shore, to be free from pain, and to live a life of purity.

Āḷavaka, once fierce and defiant, now sat humbly before the Buddha, asking the questions his ancestors had carried for generations.

The Buddha's Response: Saddhā as the Starting Point

When **Āḷavaka** asked, "How does one cross the flood?" the Blessed One replied:
"Saddhāya taratī oghaṃ"—One crosses the flood of **saṃsāra** through faith.

This answer reveals a deep truth: Faith is the gateway to the Dhamma. The entire Noble Path begins with **saddhā**—faith in the Triple Gem.

Saddhā in the Gradual Path

When we speak of the five strengths of a trainee (**sekha bala dhammā**), the sequence begins with:
• **Saddhā** (faith), **Sīla** (virtue), **Suta** (learning), **Cāga** (generosity), **Paññā** (wisdom)

Next, when the Blessed One speaks about the wealth possessed by a noble disciple (**ārya sāvaka**), the very first treasure he highlights is faith. He declares: "**Saddhā dhanaṃ**" — Faith is a form of wealth.

The Five Spiritual Faculties (**Pañca Indriya Dhamma**)

These are the five inner strengths that guide a practitioner toward liberation: Next are the Five Spiritual Powers:

• The Power of Faith (**Saddhā Bala**), The Power of Energy (**Viriya Bala**), The Power of Mindfulness (**Sati Bala**), The Power of Concentration (**Samādhi Bala**), The Power of Wisdom (**Paññā Bala**) These five are known as the **Pañca Bala Dhamma**—the unshakable strengths that support a practitioner on the path to liberation.

The Buddha presents **saddhā** not merely as a mental quality, but as a precious possession—a spiritual treasure that surpasses material riches. It is the foundation upon which the noble path begins, the seed from which liberation grows. Faith is the foundation. Without it, the path cannot begin.

In every aspect of the path, faith (**saddhā**) comes first. Only one who has faith in the Triple Gem can begin the journey. It is the faithful person who lives a virtuous life. It is the faithful person who accepts the Buddha's Dhamma and trusts in its truth.

According to the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, this cycle of **saṃsāra** is a perilous journey. It is a dangerous path, where one may fall into the four lower realms after death. To be freed from this, one must live a life of virtue. And it is the faithful person who upholds virtue.

From that virtue arises concentration (**samādhi**). And it is the concentrated person who develops wisdom (**paññā**) through that **samādhi**. Thus, for anyone who progresses in the Buddha's dispensation, the starting point is always faith. To cross the flood of **saṃsāra**, the very first requirement is **saddhā**.

This is what the Blessed One explained to **Āḷavaka** when teaching the value of faith:

"Saddhāya taratī oghaṃ" —It is through faith that one crosses the flood.

When **Āḷavaka** asked, "How does one cross the ocean?" the Blessed One replied: **"Appamādena aṇṇavaṃ**" —One crosses the ocean through diligence.

This means: to cross the vast ocean of **saṃsāra**, one must cultivate wholesome qualities with unwavering effort. **In the Buddha's Dhamma**, **appamāda** (diligence) is inseparable from **viriya**—the energy that drives the path forward.

Look at how central **viriya** is throughout the teachings:

• In the Four Right Efforts (**sammā-padhāna**), **viriya** is the force behind abandoning unwholesome states and cultivating wholesome ones.

• In the Four Bases of Spiritual Power (**iddhipāda**), **viriya-iddhipāda** is one of the four foundations for miraculous development.

• In the Seven Factors of Enlightenment (**bojjhaṅga**), **viriya-sambojjhaṅga** is a key factor that energizes awakening.

• In the Five Spiritual Faculties (**indriya**), **viriya-indriya** is the strength of effort.

• In the Five Powers (**bala**), **viriya-bala** is the unshakable power of perseverance.

• In the Noble Eightfold Path, **sammā-vāyāma** (Right Effort) is the direct expression of **viriya**.

Thus, in the Buddha's dispensation, it is through **viriya**—through tireless, joyful effort—that one crosses the ocean of **saṃsāra** and reaches the shore of liberation.

The Elephant's Footprint of All Wholesome Qualities (Appamāda: The One Word That Holds All Kusala Dhamma)

In one of the Blessed One's discourses, he declares:
"Bhikkhus, if all wholesome qualities in this world were to be gathered and carved into a single word, that word would be appamāda—heedfulness."

To illustrate this, the Buddha offers a powerful simile:
"Just as among all footprints of animals that walk the earth, the footprint of the elephant is the largest, and within it the footprints of all other creatures can be contained—so too, **appamāda** contains all wholesome qualities."

Appamāda as the Essence of Kusala Dhamma

If we speak of **kusala**—wholesomeness, virtue, wisdom, effort, mindfulness—all of it flourishes only through **appamāda**. **Appamāda** is the guardian of the path, the light that keeps the practitioner awake, the force that deepens virtue, sharpens wisdom, and sustains liberation.

Look closely: the final words of the Buddha were a call to diligence.

"Handadāni bhikkhave āmantayāmi vo—
Vaya dhammā saṅkhārā,
Appamādena sampādetha."

"Monks, I now address you one last time:
All conditioned things are impermanent.
Strive diligently to perfect the path."

These were the last words spoken by the Blessed One before his **Parinibbāna**.

And what did he emphasize? **Appamāda**—heedfulness, diligence, unwavering effort in cultivating the wholesome.

So, when **Āḷavaka** asked, “How does one cross the ocean?”
The Buddha replied: “**Appamādena aṇṇavaṃ**.”
—“Through diligence, one crosses the ocean.”

This ocean is none other than **saṃsāra**—the endless cycle of birth and death. To cross it, one must be **appamāda**—vigilant, energetic, and devoted to the path.

Thus, the Buddha’s final teaching and his answer to **Āḷavaka** are one and the same: Diligence is the raft. Wholesome effort is the oar. Wisdom is the compass.

Next, **Āḷavaka** asked, “How does one overcome suffering?”
The Blessed One replied: **“Vīriyena dukkhaṃ acceti”** — “It is through energy and effort that one overcomes suffering.”

Indeed, it is only through **viriya**—persistent effort—that one cultivates meditation. To be free from the suffering of **saṃsāra**, one must develop insight (**vipassanā**) into the Five Aggregates of Clinging (**pañc’ūpādānakkhandhā**), seeing them as impermanent (**anicca**), unsatisfactory

(**dukkha),** and not-self **(anattā**). This insight, too, arises through effort.

Consider the boundless energy of the Buddha himself.
He declared: With such fourfold resolute effort (**caturaṅga-samannāgata vīriya**) unshakable determination, energy, mindfulness, and wisdom— the Blessed One pursued awakening.

Thus, the path to liberation is forged by **viriya**. It is the fire that burnt through delusion, the wind that carries the raft across the ocean of **saṃsāra**.

Effort: The Engine of Liberation
Vīriyena dukkhaṃ acceti —
Through effort, one overcomes suffering

To realize the Dhamma, a practitioner must begin with a spark of energy— a starting element (**ārambhaka dhātu**) that initiates the path.

Then comes the sustaining element (**nikkhama dhātu**)— the effort to maintain and deepen the practice.

Next arises the resolute element (**thāmattha dhātu**)—a firm determination:

“In this very life, I shall attain Stream-entry (**Sotāpanna**).” Until that fruit is realized, one must uphold unbroken **vīriya**.
Or one may resolve: “In this very life, I shall attain **Arahantship**.” This becomes one’s final goal (**niṭṭhā**)— and towards it, one must carry unwavering effort, never abandoning the path.

The Buddha’s Declaration

The Blessed One taught: **“Vīriyena dukkhaṃ acceti”** —It is through effort that suffering is conquered.

He himself exemplified this with heroic resolve: “Let my flesh and blood dry up, let only skin, sinew, and bones remain—Yet I shall not rise from this seat Until I have attained the Dhamma That must be realized through manly effort and supreme striving.” This is the **fourfold heroic effort (caturaṅga-samannāgata vīriya)**—the very force that led the Buddha to awakening.

Next, **Āḷavaka** asked: **“Paññāya parisujjhati”** — How does one become purified? The Blessed One had already explained earlier that living with wisdom is the highest way to live.

Āḷavaka had asked, "How should one live?" and the Buddha replied, "One should live with wisdom."

Now, **Āḷavaka** asked a deeper question: "**Kathaṃ su parisujjhati?"** — How does one become truly pure?

In response, the Buddha clarified that purity does not come from external acts—not from washing the body, not from cleansing the mouth, not from applying fragrant ointments or perfumes. Such outer rituals do not make a person truly pure. The Buddha did not regard someone as pure simply because of these external practices.

Āḷavaka's question was profound—he was asking about inner purification. And the Buddha gave a clear answer: **"Paññāya parisujjhati" —** It is through wisdom that one becomes purified. True purity arises from insight, from understanding reality as it is. Wisdom is the highest form of purification.

Then **Āḷavaka** asked another series of questions from the Blessed One. And as the Buddha responded with calm clarity, the anger and hostility that once burned in **Āḷavaka** began to

fade completely. His mind softened. His heart aligned with the Dhamma. He no longer sought to test the Buddha—he sought to understand.

What **Āḷavaka** now truly wished to know was: "How does one cultivate wisdom?"

In this way, as the Blessed One explained the role of energy (**vīriya**), then the way to cross the flood through faith (**saddhā**), then the importance of diligence (**appamāda**), and finally the path to purification through wisdom (**paññā**)—**Āḷavaka**'s next question naturally arose.

He asked about the path to wisdom itself. "**Kathaṃsu labhate paññaṃ,**?" —"Venerable Sir, how does one gain wisdom?"

This question revealed something profound: **Āḷavaka** had become deeply interested in wisdom. He had seen that wisdom leads to purification, that living with wisdom is the highest way to live, and now he wished to know: How is this wisdom cultivated? What is the path to it?

His inquiry had shifted—from challenge to reverence, from confrontation to sincere seeking.

Since purification comes through wisdom, and living with wisdom is the highest way to live.

Āḷavaka next asked: "Venerable Sir, then how does one gain wisdom?" "**Kathaṃ su labhate paññaṃ**?" He wanted to understand the path to wisdom itself. Then **Āḷavaka** asked another question: "**Kathaṃ su vindati dhanaṃ**?" — How does one obtain wealth?

In his past life, **Āḷavaka** had acquired wealth through the five kinds of misconduct— through killing, stealing, and sometimes by luring people into immoral sexual activities, even running establishments that promoted such behavior. He had also sought wealth through intoxicants and harmful substances.

But now, **Āḷavaka** wanted to know: How does one become truly wealthy? Who is considered wealthy within the Dhamma? What is true wealth according to the Buddha's teaching?

So, he asked: "**Kathaṃ su vindati dhanaṃ**?" — How does one obtain wealth?

This question marked a turning point. **Āḷavaka** was no longer seeking worldly gain through

violence or deception—he was seeking spiritual wealth, the kind that brings peace, purity, and lasting fulfillment.

Not only that—**Āḷavaka** also asked: "**Kathaṃ su kittiṃ pappoti**?" —How does one attain true fame and honor?

Āḷavaka asked this because he was deeply aware of the infamy surrounding him and his followers. In the city of **Āḷavī**, society viewed them with fear and contempt. People said: "These are wicked beings—murderers, thieves, those who engage in immoral sexual conduct." They were accused of luring others into corrupt activities, even running establishments that promoted vice. They were associated with intoxicants and harmful substances. **Āḷavaka** knew this. He knew that his name was stained with disrepute, that people spoke of him with criticism and condemnation.

And so, he asked the Blessed One: "How does one become truly honourable? How does one attain noble fame in this world?" This question revealed a shift in **Āḷavaka**'s heart. He no longer sought power through fear—he sought respect through virtue. He wanted to know how to

transform his life, how to be seen not as a destroyer, but as a dignified human being.

And so, **Āḷavaka** continued to ask the Blessed One a series of profound questions.

Next, he asked: "Venerable Sir, how does one attain true fame?" "**Kathaṃ kittiṃ pappoti**?"

Then he asked: "How does one-win true friends?" "**Kathaṃ mittāni ganthati**?"But that was not all.

Āḷavaka asked yet another deeply moving question:

"How does one pass from this world to the next without sorrow?" "**Asmā lokā paraṃ lokaṃ—kathaṃ pecca na socati**?"

These questions arose from a heart that had begun to soften, to seek truth. **Āḷavaka** was no longer challenging the Buddha—he was learning from him.

He wanted to know:
- How to live honorably
- How to build genuine relationships
- How to face death without regret or grief

Each question revealed a deeper layer of transformation. From a being once feared and reviled, **Āḷavaka** was becoming a seeker of wisdom, a student of the Dhamma. Among the many questions **Āḷavaka** asked, one stood out in depth and sincerity: **"Kathaṃ su labhate paññaṃ?"**—"Venerable Sir, how does one gain wisdom?"

And the Blessed One gave a profound and structured answer, revealing the path step by step: **"Saddahāno arahataṃ dhammaṃ nibbāna-pattiyā sussūsā labhate paññaṃ, appamatto vicakkhaṇo."**—"One who has faith in the Dhamma of the Arahants, which leads to **Nibbāna**, who listens attentively, who is diligent and discerning—such a person gains wisdom."

So then, if we wish to gain wisdom, what must we do? The Blessed One taught that the Arahants, the Silent Buddhas, and all those who have realized **Nibbāna** did so by understanding and practicing a particular Dhamma—a path that leads to liberation. We must first approach that Dhamma with faith. We must listen to the teachings taught by the Buddha and the Noble Ones with a heart full of trust.

Then, the Blessed One said: "**Sussūsā labhate paññaṃ**"—By listening attentively, one gains wisdom.

But that is not enough. After hearing the Dhamma, we must continue: "**Appamatto vicakkhaṇo**" — We must be **diligent** and **discerning**, investigating what we have heard with wisdom, reflecting deeply until insight arises.

Now observe—there are several key points here. The **Arahants**, the **Silent Buddhas**, and the **Fully Enlightened Ones** attained **Nibbāna** by realizing and practicing a specific path: **"Dhammaṃ nibbāna-pattiyā"** — the Dhamma that leads to **Nibbāna**. To walk this path, one must first **listen to the Dhamma with faith**. And how does one come to hear this liberating Dhamma?

It is through the presence of **spiritual friends (kalyāṇa mitta)**. It is from noble companions that we receive the opportunity to hear the **true Dhamma (saddhamma sravaṇa)**.

These are the **two external conditions** that support the realization of Dhamma:

1. **Association with noble friends**

2. **Hearing the true Dhamma**

But to truly understand the Dhamma within oneself, two internal qualities are essential:
Wise attention **(yoniso manasikāra)** — reflecting deeply and correctly Practice in accordance with the Dhamma **(dhammānu dhammappaṭipatti)** — living in harmony with truth.

Thus, one must become a person who investigates the Dhamma with wisdom, who lives by it, reflects on it, and never grows negligent.

This is exactly what the Blessed One showed **Āḷavaka**: To gain wisdom, one must first hear the Dhamma that leads to **Nibbāna**, then listen attentively, and finally, investigate it diligently and wisely **"Appamatto vicakkhaṇo"** never careless, always discerning.

Now look—we have heard from the Dhamma that:
The eye is impermanent,
The ear is impermanent,
The nose is impermanent,
The tongue is impermanent,
The body is impermanent,
The mind is impermanent.

In the same way, we have also heard that: Visible forms seen by the eye are impermanent, sounds heard by the ear are impermanent, scents perceived by the nose are impermanent, tastes experienced by the tongue are impermanent, touches felt by the body are impermanent, and mental objects known by the mind are impermanent.

But that's not all. From these six sense bases, consciousness arises— eye-consciousness (**cakkhu-viññāṇa**), ear-consciousness (**sota-viññāṇa**), nose-consciousness (**ghāna-viññāṇa**), tongue-consciousness (**jivhā-viññāṇa**), body-consciousness (**kāya-viññāṇa**), and mind-consciousness (**mano-viññāṇa**).

All of these arise dependent on the six internal sense bases. And all of them, too, are impermanent. In this way, when we have heard a Dhamma teaching, we are instructed to investigate it wisely and diligently until wisdom arises. This is called engaging in **yoniso manasikāra**—wise attention.

How does one practice this? For example, if we have heard that "the eye is impermanent," then we must ask ourselves: "Is my eye truly

impermanent?" We investigate this deeply, reflectively, within ourselves. This is how one engages in **yoniso manasikāra**. If we have heard that "the ear is impermanent," then we must examine: "Is my ear truly impermanent?" We reflect on its nature, its arising and passing. Next, if we've heard that "the nose is impermanent," we must ask: "Is my nose truly impermanent?" How did it arise? What sustains it? We understand that the body—including the nose—arises from nutriment, from the four great elements (**mahā dhātu**), and from form aggregates (**rūpa khandha**). When food ceases, form ceases. We investigate this truth. We break it down. We analyze how it decays, how it becomes waste, how it disintegrates into elemental processes. We reflect on how these forms are subject to aging, dissolution, and death. This is how one investigates impermanence— through **yoniso manasikāra**, with unwavering diligence.

And the Blessed One taught **Āḷavaka**: If one engages in wise attention without negligence, that person will surely gain wisdom.

Next, **Āḷavaka** asked:
"How does one become wealthy?" The Blessed One replied: "**Patirūpakārī dhūrava**" Engage in

righteous and appropriate duties with strong effort.

Āḷavaka had spent much of his life involved not in wholesome actions, but in the five kinds of misconduct— killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and intoxication.

Yet the Buddha taught him: "**Uṭṭhānena vindate dhanaṃ**" — Through energetic striving, one obtains wealth.

Not through laziness or wrongdoing, but through vigorous, honest effort. This is the path to becoming truly wealthy in this world.

The Buddha elaborated this further in teachings like the **Vyagghapajja Sutta**, where he explained the four qualities that lead to prosperity:

- **Uṭṭhāna-sampadā** – Initiative and effort. Rising early, working diligently, being proactive.
- **Ārakkha-sampadā** – Protection of wealth. Safeguarding what is earned through wise management.

- **Kalyāṇa-mittatā** – Association with good friends. Keeping company with virtuous, wise companions.
- **Sama-jīvikatā** – Balanced livelihood. Living within one's means, aligning expenses with income.

Thus, the Blessed One taught that true wealth arises not from exploitation, but from effort, wisdom, and ethical living.

In the same way, when **Āḷavaka** asked the Blessed One how one progresses and prospers, he inquired: "How does one become wealthy?" The Buddha explained that true wealth arises through righteous conduct and strong effort. One must engage in wholesome actions with diligence, and earn through honest, ethical means without laziness or wrongdoing. The Blessed One said: A person who works with vigorous effort in righteous livelihoods and does not fall into misconduct becomes truly wealthy. But that was not all.

Āḷavaka had another question: **"How does one become renowned?" "How does one attain true honour and fame?"**

This was a heartfelt inquiry, because **Āḷavaka** and his followers were widely condemned. They were known in society for infamy, fear, and misconduct. People criticized and rejected them.

The Blessed One replied: Thus, a person becomes honourable and respected not through power or fear, but through truthfulness and integrity. True, Dhamma aligned fame arises from speaking truth, living truth, and embodying truth.

The Blessed One declared: “For one who speaks falsehood, there is no evil that cannot be committed.” Why is that? Because a person who lies can cover up any wrongdoing. Even if they commit murder, they can say: “No, I didn’t do it. I wasn’t even there.” They can give false testimony, swear oaths, and deceive others. If they steal, they can say: “It wasn’t me. I didn’t take anything.” They can shift blame onto others. If they engage in sexual misconduct, they can say: “I didn’t do that. I don’t know anything about it.” They can lie repeatedly, insisting it’s not a falsehood. Even if they indulge in intoxicants or drugs, they can say: “I didn’t do it. It was someone else.” Thus, one who lives by lies can

commit any kind of evil without fear of being held accountable.

That is why the Buddha said: “For one who lies, there is no evil that cannot be done.” See how true this is: Those who engage in the five kinds of misconduct often try to hide their actions through lies, claiming: “I’m not that kind of person.” But in society, such individuals become known for their infamy and disgrace.

The Blessed One taught: If a person lives a virtuous life, and speaks truthfully, they become someone honourable and trustworthy. Such a person lives honestly and righteously— a speaker of truth.

That is why the Blessed One declared: “Monks, throughout this long journey in **saṃsāra**— across countless aeons, fulfilling the **pāramī** (perfections)— never once have I spoken a lie.” Why? Because the Buddha’s awakening was to truth—to the Noble Truths, to the ultimate reality that governs all existence. One who aspires to realize the supreme truth does not walk the path of falsehood. From the very day the Bodhisattva began cultivating the **pāramī**, through all his lives in **saṃsāra**, he never spoke a lie.

That is why the Blessed One taught: "**Saccena kittiṃ pappoti**" —It is through truthfulness that one attains true fame. He showed **Āḷavaka** the path to honour and renown: not through power, fear, or deception, but through truthfulness, integrity, and virtue.

Next, **Āḷavaka** longed to know: **How does one find true spiritual friends**? How does one cultivate genuine, noble companionship?

This question arose from his own experience. In the life **Āḷavaka** had lived, even among his own circle, he saw that those around him were not true friends. Often, we observe that violent individuals live in constant fear— even of their own companions. They are suspicious, tense, and guarded. They carry weapons, live in conflict, and sometimes even kill one another. Their relationships are marked by distrust, aggression, and betrayal. **Āḷavaka** saw this clearly. He realized that he had not known true friendship.

So, he asked: **How does one choose a true friend**? How does one build **noble friendships**?

The Blessed One showed how to cultivate true friendship: **A person who is generous, who gives**

with a sincere heart, who engages in meritorious deeds and the practice of Dhamma, is the kind of person who naturally attracts noble companions. This is how one builds true and wholesome friendships.

The Buddha answered **Āḷavaka**'s questions with profound clarity and compassion. Each response revealed a truth that **Āḷavaka** had never heard before. He had lived a life surrounded by fear, violence, and false companionship—but now, through the Dhamma, he was discovering a new way to live. He had never imagined that such Dhamma-aligned answers existed to the questions that had long stirred in his heart. That is why **Āḷavaka** continued to ask the Blessed One—because each answer illuminated his path, and transformed his understanding of life.

But see how wise **Āḷavak**a truly was—the final question he asked the Blessed One was: **Āḷavaka wanted to know the path to a death free from grief—a transition from this life to the next with peace and dignity.**

And the Blessed One answered with profound clarity: A person who possesses four noble

qualities can pass from this world to the next without sorrow:

- Truthfulness (**Saccavādī bhāva**) Speaking truth, living truth
- Sense restraint (**Indriya damana**) Guarding the senses from defilement
- Courage (**Dhīra**) Facing life and death with fearless resolve
- Generosity (**Pariccāga**) Letting go, giving freely, cultivating selflessness

Such a person, endowed with faith, who lives a virtuous and mindful life, will not be overcome by grief at death.

We see that truthfulness leads to moral purity, and sense restraint protects the mind from craving and agitation.

One who guards the eye from clinging to forms, the ear from grasping sounds, the nose from chasing scents, the tongue from craving tastes, the body from indulgence in touch— and the mind from being swept away by thoughts—Such a person lives with clear awareness and inner discipline. This is the path to a peaceful death and a noble rebirth.

Next, the Blessed One taught that: A person who is deeply courageous, who is generous, who is accustomed to letting go, and who is faithful, — when endowed with these four noble qualities, and who cultivates the Dhamma with sincerity— will pass from this world to the next without sorrow.

Such a person lives with: Truthfulness, Sense restraint, Courage, Generosity. They face life and death with a steady heart, give freely without clinging, and walk the path of Dhamma with unwavering faith. This is the kind of person the Buddha described—one who departs this life peacefully, without grief, regret, or fear.

"**Āḷavaka**, if anyone knows of another way to cross over without grief, you may ask any monk, brahmin, or ascetic and learn from them. But this is the path I declare."

"Venerable Sir, from whom else could I ask? Your words have illuminated my heart. I have understood this clearly. It is as though something long concealed has been revealed— Like a person dwelling in darkness being shown the light, like one blindfolded now able to see forms clearly. Blessed One, you have unveiled to me the true

nature of the Dhamma. You have made it known. Therefore, I have no need to ask anyone else. I have understood. I have realized."

With a heart overflowing with joy, **Āḷavaka** stepped out into the light.
He cried out with delight, proclaiming: "I will carry this message from village to village, from city to city!" He ran, he walked, he shouted with joy: "Why do you live this way? A Blessed One has arisen in the world! The Buddha teaches the Dhamma—abandon evil, let go of wrongdoing, and realize the truth!" He declared: "I too have encountered this Dhamma. I have understood it. You too—quickly, come to understand this Dhamma! A Buddha has arisen in the world!"

And so **Āḷavaka**, once feared and lost, became a radiant messenger of truth, spreading the Dhamma from village to village, from city to city, with a heart awakened and a voice full of light.

The Blessed One possesses the supreme quality known as "**Anuttaro purisadammasārathi**"—the unsurpassed trainer of those who can be trained. This means that the Buddha is supremely skilled in taming even the most fearsome

individuals. He has three powerful methods by which he brings transformation:

1. **Ādesanā pāṭihāriya** – the miracle of mind-reading and revealing thoughts
2. **Anusāsanī pāṭihāriya** – the miracle of profound instruction and guidance
3. **Iddhi pāṭihāriya** – the miracle of supernormal power

Through any of these means, the Buddha can skilfully subdue and guide a person toward the Dhamma. Even someone as terrifying and violent as **Āḷavaka**—a man who lived as a ruthless criminal steeped in the fivefold misconduct, surrounded by a brutal and destructive band of followers—even he was transformed by the Buddha's compassion and wisdom.

Āḷavaka, known in that time as a **Yakkha** or fierce spirit-being, was feared by the people of **Āḷavī**, a city where he ruled as a dreaded leader, engaged in terrifying and violent acts. Because of his deeds, he and his followers were known among the people as a dangerous and fearsome clan. And yet, the Buddha—through his unmatched skill as a spiritual charioteer—was able to tame and transform even him.

When the Blessed One came to Sri Lanka, there were many tribal groups already living there—**Nāga** tribes, **Yakkha** tribes, and other fierce clans. The **Nāga** tribes were not literal snakes, but human groups who revered serpent deities, often wearing serpent emblems and symbols. The **Yakkha** tribes were known for their violent and fearsome nature, engaging in rituals of sacrifice and worship to spirits, living with aggression and terror. **Āḷavaka** was one such figure—a man of terrifying power, a ruthless leader among a brutal band, living like a **Yakkha**, feared by all. Yet even such a fearsome being was tamed by the Blessed One. The Buddha did not use force—he used Dhamma. To every question **Āḷavak**a asked, the Blessed One responded with wisdom and compassion.

By the end of this sacred dialogue, **Āḷavaka** attained the fruit of stream-entry (**Sotāpanna**). He realized the Dhamma. And with that realization came immense joy.

It is said that **Āḷavaka** ran from village to village, from city to city, crying out with joy: He became a messenger of awakening, spreading the light of the Dhamma with a heart transformed by truth.

The Blessed One possesses a supreme quality: the ability to tame even the most fearsome individuals. No matter how violent or unruly a person may be, the Buddha's wisdom and compassion can transform them. **Āḷavaka**, once a terrifying figure, came to understand the Dhamma through the Blessed One's teaching. He abandoned his former ways and lived a deeply virtuous and Dhamma-aligned life.

After his death, it is said that **Āḷavaka** was reborn in a celestial realm, bearing the name **Āḷavaka**, as a **Yakkha** commander—a noble being among the divine hosts. This transformation stands as a radiant testament to the Buddha's boundless compassion and the liberating power of the Dhamma.

In the **Āṭānāṭiya Sutta**, it is said that **Vessavaṇa Deva** (King of the North) approached the Blessed One and spoke:
"Venerable Sir, if any fierce non-human being causes harm or disturbance to the disciples of the Blessed **Tathāgata**, may the devas be reminded and informed—so that protection may be offered."

Vessavaṇa further declared: "If these non-human beings ignore the words of the devas and continue

to trouble the disciples of the Blessed One, then there are **Yakkha** commanders under my authority who will intervene."

These **Yakkha** commanders are not ordinary **yakkhas**. They are divine guardians who punish unruly **yakkhas**. They are fierce and powerful, appointed to discipline and restrain those who violate the Dhamma. These are celestial enforcers of justice, protecting the noble disciples from harm and upholding the sanctity of the Buddha's path.

Those punishments are carried out under the command of **Vessavaṇa Deva**, by divine commanders who operate under the authority of the devas, tasked with controlling and disciplining unruly non-human beings. When a disciple of the Blessed One is afflicted by such a being, they are instructed to cry out and call upon these divine protectors, saying:

- **Ayaṃ yakkho gaṇhāti** – "This **yakkha** is troubling me."
- **Ayaṃ yakkho āvisati** – "This **yakkha** is possessing me."
- **Ayaṃ yakkho heṭheti** – "This **yakkha** is tormenting me."

• **Ayaṃ yakkho viheṭheti** – "This **yakkha** is severely oppressing me."
• **Ayaṃ yakkho hiṁsati** – "This **yakkha** is harming me."
• **Ayaṃ yakkho vihiṁsati** – "This **yakkha** is violently harming me."
• **Ayaṃ yakkho na muñcati** – "This **yakkha** will not release me."

These cries are to be directed to the divine commanders appointed by **Vessavaṇa**, who are not **yakkhas** themselves, but deities who punish and restrain **yakkhas**. They are fierce and powerful, tasked with disciplining wrongdoers and protecting the noble disciples.

The **Āṭānāṭiya Sutta** lists many such divine names—including **Inda**, **Soma, Varuṇa, Bhāradvāja, Pajāpati, Candana, Kāmasettha, Kinnu, Ghaṇḍu, Nighaṇḍu**, and among them is the name **Āḷavaka**, now counted among the **Yakkha** commanders who uphold justice under **Vessavaṇa**'s rule.

Now consider what is revealed in the **Āṭānāṭiya Sutta**: Among the **Yakkha** commanders who serve under **Vessavaṇa Deva**, there is one named **Āḷavaka**, who, having attained stream-entry

(**Sotāpanna**) through the Blessed One's teaching, was reborn as a deity.

However, because he had lived as a person of extremely fierce and violent nature, his rebirth was not into a realm of supreme pleasure and luxury. Instead, he was born into the **Chātummahārājika** heaven, under the command of **Vessavaṇa Deva**, as a divine commander tasked with disciplining rebellious **yakkhas**.

Though he is now a celestial being, **Āḷavaka** is known today as one of the **Yakkha** generals, a guardian deity who enforces justice among non-human beings. This is why, in the present day, **Āḷavaka** is recognized not only as a deity, but specifically as a **Yakkha** commander under **Vessavaṇa**'s authority, dwelling in the celestial realm of the Four Great Kings.

Today, someone might assume that **Āḷavaka** was just another ghost, spirit, or demon—a being of the same kind as the **pretas**, **bhūtas**, or **kumbhāṇḍas** we often hear about. They might think the Buddha simply scolded or subdued a wild **yakkha**. This is a common misunderstanding.

But when we study the discourse carefully—especially with the support of the commentaries and sub-commentaries (**Aṭṭhakathā** and **Ṭīkā**)—we come to understand the deeper truth. **Āḷavaka** was, in fact, a human being who lived a very violent and destructive life. He engaged in terrifying acts and was feared by many. But after hearing the Dhamma from the Blessed One, he came to a profound realization and attained stream-entry (**Sotāpanna**). After his death, **Āḷavaka** was reborn in the celestial realm, not as a mere spirit, but as a divine **Yakkha** commander under the authority of **Vessavaṇa Deva**. Today, he is known as a guardian deity in the heavenly world, holding the title of **Yakkha Senāpati**—a celestial general who upholds justice and protects the Dhamma.

According to the **Āṭānāṭiya Sutta**, if any non-human beings cause harm or disturbance to the disciples of the Blessed One—whether they be **bhikkhus**, **bhikkhunīs**, laymen, or laywomen—they are instructed to call upon the **Yakkha** commanders, including **Āḷavaka**, and say: "This being is troubling me. This being is obstructing me in my practice of the Dhamma. This being is harassing me. Please protect me." They are to

invoke the name of **Āḷavaka Yakkha Senāpati**, and call upon him for protection.

Then, as the **Sutta** states, these divine guardians will appear, confront the non-human being causing harm, punish them if necessary, and protect the one who lives in accordance with the Dhamma. This is the compassionate safeguard granted to the noble disciples—a celestial defence for those who walk the path of truth.

Through the **Āḷavaka Sutta**, we clearly understand the supreme quality of the Blessed One known as **Anuttaro purisadammasārathi**, the unsurpassed trainer of those who can be trained, even the most fearsome and unruly individuals. That is why we take refuge in the Blessed One.

During His lifetime, the Buddha tamed many terrifying beings— such as **Aṅgulimāla**, a ruthless murderer, and **Āḷavaka**, a violent and fearsome man. Not only humans, but even wild animals—like the fierce elephant **Nāḷāgiri**—were subdued by the Buddha's compassion and wisdom. Even such a beast bowed before the Blessed One, humbled and transformed. These stories reveal the depth of the Buddha's power as

the supreme charioteer of beings, able to guide anyone—human or animal—toward peace. So, reflect deeply on this noble quality of the Buddha.

If someone like **Āḷavaka** could understand the Dhamma, then ask yourself: Why not me? Let that question stir your heart. May you cultivate effort and energy, study the answers the Buddha gave to **Āḷavaka**, and through wisdom, come to understand the Dhamma yourself. May all of you progress in the Dhamma and be blessed with the fortune of awakening.

NOTES

*The **Āḷavaka Sutta** is one of the most powerful and emotionally resonant discourses in the **Pali** Canon. It's not just a dramatic encounter between the Buddha and a fearsome being—it's a profound teaching on ethical transformation, spiritual courage, and the universal accessibility of the Dhamma.*

Here's what makes it so remarkable:

A Journey from Fury to Faith

***Āḷavaka** begins as a terrifying figure—violent, impulsive, and feared. Yet the Buddha doesn't respond with fear or force. He responds with wisdom, patience, and compassion. The dialogue unfolds like a spiritual duel, but instead of defeating **Āḷavaka**, the Buddha liberates him.*

The Buddha as Supreme Trainer

*This sutta beautifully illustrates the Buddha's title **Anuttaro purisadammasārathi** "the unsurpassed trainer of those who can be trained."Even the most unruly, dangerous beings—like **Āḷavaka**, **Aṅgulimāla**, or **Nāḷāgiri**—are not beyond transformation. The Buddha sees their potential and guides them with precision and grace.*

The Questions That Pierce the Heart

***Āḷavaka**'s questions are raw and existential:*

- *What is the greatest wealth?*
- *What leads to happiness?*
- *How does one cross the flood?*
- *How does one live without sorrow?*

The Buddha's answers are simple yet profound—faith, virtue, wisdom, generosity, truthfulness, restraint, courage. These are not abstract ideals; they are practical tools for liberation.

The Cry of Awakening

*The emotional climax—when **Āḷavaka** realizes the truth and runs from village to village proclaiming the Dhamma—is deeply moving. It's a moment of pure joy, the kind that arises when darkness is dispelled and the heart is free.*

A Sutta of Protection and Empowerment

*In later texts like the **Āṭānāṭiya Sutta**, **Āḷavaka** is remembered not as a demon, but as a celestial protector—a **Yakkha** commander under **Vessavaṇa**. His transformation is complete: from terror to guardian, from ignorance to light.*

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